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BY

DAVID LEE CLARK
Instructor in English

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE SERIES No. 2

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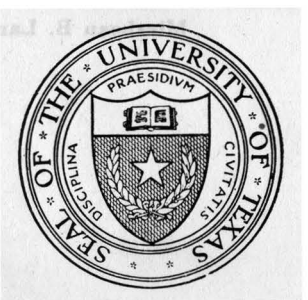

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The benefits of education and of useful knowledge, generally diffused through a community, are essential to the preservation of a free government.

Sam Houston

Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy. . . . It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire.

Mirabeau B. Lamar

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NOTE

This monograph is part of an extended study of the life and works of Brockden Brown which the author has in forward state of preparation.

Introduction

One cannot correctly appraise the literature dealing with the social and political emancipation of women in the last third of the eighteenth century without some knowledge of the evolution of the thought of which that literature is a record. Particularly is this so in evaluating the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and Brockden Brown. It is too generally assumed that the first two were the originators of the social theories that are now so invariably associated with their names; and that their work in turn inspired Brockden Brown in America.

Although a detailed study of the struggle for the social and political freedom of women is beyond the scope of the present work, certain general tendencies in the literature of revolt in England, France, and America, will be briefly traced.

As a matter of fact neither Mary Wollstonecraft, nor William Godwin, nor yet Brockden Brown was an original thinker, for there is nothing really new in any of them. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Rights of Women* (1792), and Godwin in his *Political Justice* (1793) and in his novels, did, however, put the arguments for the social emancipation of men and women in imperishable form, and thus established their chief claim to a place in the literature of the movement. Brockden Brown was familiar with the works of these writers, but he was also familiar with what had been done by others earlier than the time of Godwin. It can be shown that Brown was full of the revolutionary spirit before the appearance of the *Rights of Women* and *Political Justice,* and that the influence of these two works upon Brown has been overemphasized.

Theories of government and social reform are so much a part of Brown's life and writings that some account of them in relation to his predecessors seems necessary. Brown's political theories were shaped by Locke and his French and American disciples. Hobbes had asserted the

absolute authority of the ruler, but Locke pointed out how the compact into which men had voluntarily entered by giving up some of their natural rights for certain advantages, was unalterably binding upon all subsequent generations, and thus were established those rights of man that no law of man or king could transgress. This theory, so generally accepted during the first half of the eighteenth century, in the hands of the radical became the basis of an argument that led straight to the American Revolution and, subsequently, to the greater revolution in France. But in the hands of the conservative it was a tool for despotism, for it gave a kind of sanction to any existing order. Permanence, not progress, became the ideal of government. According to Locke government existed solely for the good of the people. He even spoke of an ideal state, a golden age in the past, and of government as being made necessary to check the ambition and luxury that have subsequently crept in. No man, he said, should be governed except by his own consent, and no man should be punished by fallible men. Yet it is to be carefully noted that these doctrines of the natural rights of man had no marked effect upon the English people as a whole, for in England the conservative Whigs interpreted Locke as giving sanction to the position that "whatever is, is right," and it is upon this ground that Burke defended the English Constitution and condemned the French Revolution. Price, Priestley, Paine, Jefferson, Brockden Brown, and others, however, put a construction upon Locke's theory of state that embraced all the current radicalism in France, England, and America. William Godwin, indeed, was an ultraradical and would have abolished all government.

While Locke's plan of government did not specifically assign to woman a place in the body politic, by implication, at least, she was acknowledged to be an important factor in the social fabric. But women were so hopelessly low in the social scale that only the bravest men and women before 1790 ventured to suggest that women, like men, have political rights. They had first, indeed, to be emancipated socially and intellectually before any thought could be given

to political and economic freedom. Woman had for centuries been considered a shallow, helpless creature, to be petted, caressed, or corrected by her superior lord, or else she was a moral being whose virtue had to be constantly guarded. The old Hebrew canon law was generally in force and was pointed to as authority for the enslavement of women. The sacred scriptures were invoked to prove that woman was created solely for the comfort of man, and as such had no liberty of active or independent judgment. Her highest virtue was obedience to the will of her lord, and her chief occupation was child-bearing. Indeed, her whole life was regulated by these considerations. She had no part in the moral, intellectual, or economic direction of her home, and no authority over her children. But, as there was no alternative course to marriage, we read much in the literature of the times of woman's use of social tricks and snares to inveigle men into marriage, and to keep them hoodwinked afterwards. This notion of woman as a mere charmer grew to such proportions that it came to the notice of the English Parliament, and as late as 1770 a law was passed that prescribed that "all women, of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall, from and after such act, impose upon, induce, or betray into matrimony, any of his Majesty's male subjects by scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes, etc., shall incur the penalty of the law now enforced against witchcraft and like demeanors, and that the marriage upon conviction shall stand null and void."[1]

Oliver Cromwell in the famous civil marriage code of 1653 sought to lighten the burden for women by placing all marriages and divorces in the hands of the civil courts, in which the man and the woman were on an equality. But this law was ineffectual, for public opinion was against it.

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[1] *Woman: Women of England*, Vol. IX, p. 318. Cf. Pope's *Epistle to a Lady* (1735) in which woman's ruling passion is said to be "the love of pleasure and the love of sway."

Milton's attitude toward matrimony was more nearly representative of the Puritan point of view. He pleaded vigorously for liberal divorce laws, but solely for the sake of the man. Imbued as he was with the sentiments of the scriptures Milton's position was not at all singular. There were many arguments in the literature of his time for the enslavement of women. It is not necessary in this connection to consider the social freedom of certain types of women in the *beau monde*.

I

The first significant reaction in favor of women set in during the closing years of the seventeenth century.[2] Mary Astell (1668-1731) in her *Serious Proposal* (1695) endeavored to lift the women of her day to a dignified, moral, and self-sustaining life. She emphasized economic independence and a life of religious service, an ideal which was to be attained through proper education of young women. It may be urged against her scheme of education that it was too far removed from life—a kind of nunnery. In her *Reflections on Marriage* (1700) Mary Astell took the contemporary Lockean view of the permanence of the marriage bond, and argued against divorce. Her remedy for unhappiness in the matrimonial state was timely prevention of unwise marriages. This prevention would be found only in a more generous education for women. When once married, the woman was submissively to bear the yoke; the family must have a head and the man, though not superior, is the natural head.

Daniel Defoe in his *An Essay Upon Projects* (1697) was the first writer of any importance to champion the cause of women. In a way his essay has a modern ring to it, and is very suggestive of Mary Wollstonecraft and Brockden Brown. He argued that man reproached the sex—the usual designation of woman throughout the eighteenth century—for folly and impertinence, but he maintained that the only remedy for the deplorable condition of women was adequate educational opportunities. It is a wonder, he said, that they do so well when "their youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sow or make bawbles." What would a man be good

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[2]The Renaissance and Reformation had promised much in disabusing the minds of men of long-established errors and prejudices, yet their influence in the matter was but limited and feeble. Only a few men, like Coverdale, Tyndale, More, and Hooker questioned the absolute authority of the church in matters of divorce. These men maintained the dignity of woman, and claimed for her an equality with man in matrimonial affairs.

for if taught nothing else? Why have women been denied the benefits of instruction so necessary? Knowledge and understanding would be useful to the sex, and why can any man wish to keep women ignorant? Why upbraid them with folly when only the error of this inhuman custom made them foolish? "The capacities of women," he goes on to say, "are supposed to be great, and their senses are quicker than those of the men."[3] Have men denied them an education for fear of competition with themselves? Defoe was ultra-revolutionary when he asserted that "God has given to all mankind equal gifts and capacities, in that he has given them all souls equally capable; and that the whole difference in mankind proceeds either from accidental difference in the make of their bodies, or from the *foolish difference of education.*"[4] Women must not be men's cooks or slaves, but men's companions.

I have dwelt on this work of Defoe because there is a striking similarity of argument between it and Brown's *Rights of Women,* just one hundred years later. Defoe makes the first claim for woman's natural equality with man. In only one particular was he a slave to contemporary prejudices, and even in this, one cannot be sure that Defoe was not ironical. Woman's virtue, he said, must be a cloistered virtue, and consequently proper guards must be set. He would place women in public academies with all the facilities for advanced work in the arts and the sciences, but the school building must be so plain and so situated that a watchful eye could take in all parts of it at one glance; and he would take particular pains to surround it with a large moat having only one accessible entrance, that intriguing with young men might be made difficult.

The work of Mary Astell and of Defoe was not particularly influential, and the first third of the eighteenth century saw but little improvement in the condition of women. The attitude of Addison,[5] under the thin disguise of helping

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[3]*An Essay upon Projects,* p, 284.

[4]*An Essay Upon Projects,* p. 299.

[5]Addison: *Tatler,* Nos. 100, 102, 120, 250, 256, 265; *Spectator,* Nos. 37, 45, 311.

women, was one of contempt for their weakness, and his was the typical attitude, for married life was still thought of as a sexual relation; the wife was not a companion of her husband. Education was deliberately discouraged, and an open sanction of a double standard of morals was everywhere given. Such a condition was upheld both by the teachings of the church and by the practice of the law, and made popular in current literature.

But together with the general conception of the weakness of women was a vague feeling on the part of some men that the cause of the low social condition of men and women alike, was the neglect of woman's education. Unlike Addison, Richard Steele in *The Christian Hero* and the Jenny Distaff numbers of *The Tatler*[6] pleaded for a higher view of woman than the conventional one, according to which immorality was considered an indication of high spirits; in his dramas the loftier virtues always triumph; he decried the double standard. Steele engendered a feeling, which, as the years passed, grew to a firm conviction in the minds of many unprejudiced men and women and around this conception a formidable bulk of pamphlet literature sprang up. Swift, too, held that women were not entirely to blame for the deplorable social conditions. "The nobility and gentry of both sexes," he said, "are entirely corrupted, both in body and mind, and have lost all notion of love, honor, friendship, generosity." He attributed this condition to the exclusion of women from any share in society, other than that of play, dancing, or the pursuit of an amour. He put the whole trouble succintly when, in a *Letter to a Young Lady on Her Marriage,* he said that women were uneducated and unable to converse intelligently on important matters, that they spent their time on trifles, as if their whole existence was concerned with the cut or color of a dress. Again he wrote, they should be educated in essential things, whereas they were actually taught to be fools, coquettes, gamesters, talkers of nonsense,

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[6]Steele: *Tatler,* Nos. 10, 33, 36, 37, 79, 104, 143; *Spectator,* Nos. 155, 182, 190, 266, 274, 437, 479.

idlers. How then could they hope to gain the esteem of their husbands?[7] Swift also insisted upon a single standard of morality for men and women. "I am ignorant of any one quality," he said, "that is amiable in a man which is not equally so in woman. I do not except modesty and gentleness of nature. Nor do I know any vice or folly which is not equally detestable in both."[8] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in a letter to Wortley Montagu in 1710 deplores the general notion that "ignorance and folly are thought the best foundation for virtue."[9] In another letter she says that "a face is too light a foundation for happiness."[10] She wrote to the Countess of Mar in 1723 that she was "very sorry for the forlorn state of matrimony—both sexes have found the inconvenience of it."[11] But Lady Mary acknowledged the inferiority of women in all respects.

The notion of the relative merits of the sexes had gradually crept into the discussions, until in 1739, an interesting pamphlet war was on. The first shot was an article entitled *Woman Not Inferior to Man,*[12] by *"Sophia, a Person of Quality,"* in which women's claims to economic independence were strongly protested. The writer asserted that women are capable of becoming successful doctors, lawyers, professors, legislators, and even soldiers, but not clergywomen. This was, indeed, the boldest claim yet made for the rights and powers of women. But such a challenge did not long remain unanswered, for a fierce attack was made in the same year in a pamphlet calledd *Man Superior to Woman,*[13] which concluded that women were qualified for

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[7]*Essay on Education of Ladies.*

[8]*Letter to a Young Lady on Her Marriage.*

[9]Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, London, 1861, Vol. I., p. 173.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 175.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 474.

[12]*Woman Not Inferior to Man: or, A Short and Modest Vindication of the Natural Rights of the Fair Sex to Perfect Equality of Power, Dignity, and Esteem, with Men,* by Sophia, a Person of Quality.

[13]*Man Superior to Woman—containing a plain confutation of the fallacious arguments of Sophia in her late treatise entitled, Woman Not Inferior to Man,* by A Gentleman.

nothing but the propagation of the race. *Sophia* replied in another pamphlet,[14] repeating much of the argument of her first article. All three pamphlets were published together as *Beauty's Triumph* in 1751.

In an article in the *Craftsman* (1739) a correspondent pleaded for professional training for women, particularly for unmarried women. An important article appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine,* October, 1739, under the rather daring caption of *A New Method for Making Women as Useful and as Capable of Maintaining Themselves as Men Are; and Consequently Preventing Their Becoming Old Maids, or Taking Ill Courses,* by "a Lady." The writer lamented the fact that women spend their time on trifles, whereas they should be set to learning useful trades, such as those of glovers, perfumers, grocers, mercers, etc. These trades, she maintained, are as useful and as creditable for daughters as for sons. Only by making themselves economically free from men can women ever rise to the dignity of human beings. Marriage must not be their only occupation, and should they perchance marry, they should be considered the companions, not the slaves or toys, of their husbands. She pointed out that a reaction in favor of women had come, that the leading men had acknowledged women's rights and capabilities.[15]

Hume in 1742 in his essay *Polygamy and Divorce* pleaded for more sensible marriages—marriages based upon mutual consent, and formed upon friendship. But in his essay on *The Rise of the Arts and Sciences* he said that nature had made women inferior to men both mentally and physically. William Melmoth in letter XLI of the *Letters of Sir Thomas Fitzborne* (1750) made an estimate of the comparative merits of the sexes. It is granted that men are physically, mentally, and morally superior to

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[14]*Woman's Superior Excellence over Man,* by Sophia.

[15]Claims of the natural rights of women to have representation and to be representatives in Parliament found their way into the press in 1739, and the storm of discussion continued intermittently to the end of the century.

women, but not by nature—education has been the deciding factor in men's superiority. The writer deplores the intellectual condition of women, and pleads for proper and efficient training for them. They should be educated for lives of usefulness. They should study the sciences liberally that their minds might be freed from vulgar prejudices, and that they might become reasonable creatures. *The Gentleman's Magazine* (November, 1765), carried a review of a book entitled *A Dialogue Concerning the Subjection of Women to Their Husbands,* the purpose of which was to prove the propriety of their inferior position by the usual appeal to existing laws, to nature, and to the sacred scriptures. Even a man of William Blackstone's ordinarily sound judgment could maintain that existing institutions were very generous to women.

After 1750 there was a new conception of women, and great interest was everywhere shown in their proper education. By proper education, one is to understand that peculiar variety sponsored by Rousseau, in which delicacy, softness, sensibility, obedience, and sexual attraction were considered the cardinal virtues. It was directly against the baleful influence of the books[16] that embodied this ideal of woman's education that Mary Wollstonecraft centered her attack in her *Rights of Women* (1792).

It can be seen from this survey that the question of woman's rights, from Mary Astell to Mary Wollstonecraft, was largely a question of her social and intellectual freedom. Only once was there any claim for her political emancipation. While Defoe and *Sophia* pleaded for the economic independence of woman, it is evident that they considered her social and intellectual freedom of first importance. During the years from 1690 to 1790, it will also be observed, there was no conscious effort on the part of women to assert

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[16]Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (Letter XIX); *Female Worthies* (1769); Alexander's *History of Women* (1769); Lord Kame's *Loose Hints upon Education,* second ed., 1782; Dr. Gregory's *Legacy to His Daughters* (1784); J. Bennett's *Strictures on Female Education* (1788); and Hannah More's *Essays for Young Ladies* (1789).

their claims to economic and political rights in the life of the nation. But we shall see that with the coming of the French Revolution and the industrial revolution, women assumed an importance in the economic and political life of the state before unknown.

As the dawn of the French Revolution approached, the rights of men and women were merged, and the great writers fought for the freedom of both. Their activity expressed itself in political reform, with men like Paine, Price, Priestley, Holcroft, Bage, and Godwin as champions; in the humanitarian work of Howard, Holcroft, and Cowper; in simplification in religion, law, and daily life, with particular emphasis against the luxury of the rich and privileged classes, with Wesley, Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Mary Wollstonecraft as advocates; and in reform in the educational system which most of these writers, particularly Cowper, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Godwin, pleaded for as one of the prerequisites to the realization of the whole reform. These four movements were not always clearly defined in the minds of those who advocated them, but in the literature of the day one is constantly faced with the fact that only through political reform, prison reform, universal benevolence, and the regeneration of schools and colleges, could a state of society be realised in which men and women would be valued solely for their individual worth. Some of these men were practical, and others but Utopian dreamers, and as they were almost universally read, they consequently had the chief merit of provoking discussion and speculation that led eventually to many salutary reforms and laid the foundation for a democratized England.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Where liberty is, there is my country," but Thomas Paine modified that statement by saying, "Where is not liberty, there is mine." This is the keynote of Paine's life, and the spirit which called forth this utterance was the spirit that sent Paine to America, where his services to the cause of liberty cannot be overestimated. As editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine,* Paine showed himself a pioneer in social and political reform. He early advocated the abolition of slavery, and helped organize the

first American anti-slavery society. He pleaded for the arbitration of international laws; and he demanded justice for women. In his *Common Sense,* he fought manfully for republicanism, and in 1787, when his cause had been won in America, he carried the fight to British soil, where in 1791 appeared his most important book, *The Rights of Man,* as an answer to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790). This work aroused such opposition in England that Paine was forced to flee to France, where he was almost immediately declared a citizen of the French Republic, and elected to a seat in the Convention. He was soon appointed a member of a committee of five to draft a constitution. But in these days of sudden change, Paine, like many of the great leaders, was borne down, and spent ten months in a prison cell awaiting the guillotine. Yet Paine never grew weary in the service of liberty; he never faltered or lost hope. Thomas Paine was perhaps the most daringly original thinker of his time, and most of the evils of the day were rigorously and relentlessly exposed by him.

What Paine so signally carried forward in three countries, Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, William Cowper, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft advanced in their several spheres in England. Richard Price (1723-1791), the great apologist for the Americans, was an early advocate of political reform. His famous old Jewry Sermon in 1789, in defense of revolutionary reforms, provoked Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), which in turn called forth Paine's *The Rights of Man,* James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Galliciae,* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letter to Burke.*

Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), noted non-comformist theologian and philosopher, was identified with the religious controversy of the day; was one of the founders of the Unitarian Society in 1791; vindicated the principles of the French Revolution in a letter addressed to Burke; set forth in dialogue form the general principles of government (1791); advocated the abolition of slavery; was a member of the famous Constitutional Society and, because of his activity in this society, was forced to flee. He landed in

America, June, 1794, where, as a close friend of Franklin, he received a warm welcome. He was a liberal in politics and at once took sides with the Republicanism of Jefferson, for which he brought down upon him the wrath of William Cobbett, better known as Peter Porcupine.

In the field of pure literature Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809) is the best representative of the revolutionary spirit. In his dramas[17] and in his novels[18] he attacked pride of rank and wealth, and man's domination over woman. He taught that error and folly had impeded progress toward perfection, and that truth alone can make men happy. Robert Bage (1728-1801) in several of his works[19] pictures a Utopia like the Pantisocracy of Coleridge in 1794, and anticipates parts of Brown's second dialogue of Alcuin, as some of his characters and situations do Godwin's novels. He held that reason is the only reliable basis of action; that women should have a part in the choice of a husband; that marriage should be for friendship and esteem, and not for love merely, and should be a contract between equals; he pleaded for humane divorce laws, for economic equality of women with men, to be realized by better education of women; and finally he was an advocate of free love of the Godwinian variety.

William Godwin (1756-1836) was early attached to republicanism, and by 1780 had read Rousseau, Helvetius, Swift, and many other radicals; but he was far from approving all the principles of the Revolution. In fact he did not believe in reform through violent revolutions. Reason would right all wrongs, if only given free rein. Government, he declared, is an evil, and a powerful enemy of progress, and as the race grows more virtuous, all positive governmental restraints will eventually vanish and leave mankind free in the pursuit of happiness. Godwin detested

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[17]*The School of Arrogance*, 1791; *He's Much to Blame* (1798); *Love's Frailties*, 1794.

[18]*Alwyn* (1780); *Anna St. Ives* (1792); *Hugh Trevor*, 1794-1797.

[19]*Mount Henneth* (1781); *Barham Downs* (1784); *James Wallace* (1788); *Man as He Is* (1792); *Man as He Is Not or Hermsprong* (1796).

luxury; he inveighed against the condition of the laboring classes, and called for a minimum of daily labor and a maximum of amusement and study; landlordism and the whole system of property were attacked. As men's characters originate in external circumstances, they are capable of vast improvement through proper education, but unlike Helvetius he did not regard men as absolutely equal at birth, and he rejected the notion of innate ideas. Upon this argument, rests Godwin's belief in the infinite perfectibility of man. He denounced existing educational systems as destructive of mind and body. Since the voluntary actions of men originate in their opinions, persuasion rather than force, should be employed to teach mankind. Sincerity he looked upon as the chief virtue; all hypocrisies, even down to the social or white lie, must be abolished. Man was not originally vicious but has been made so through deceptions, prejudices, and errors in existing positive institutions. He declared that the institution of marriage is a fraud, and cohabitation, an evil.

His advocacy of social and political reform, however, has little claim to originality; he merely did for the larger principles of the Revolution what Mary Wollstonecraft did for the emancipation of women—he put them into readable and impressive form in his *Political Justice* (1793). The only striking way in which the book differed from current political and social doctrines was in the emphasis placed upon idealized anarchy. Yet one must not overlook the fact that Godwin gave to the whole body of radicalism a permanent expression in a single work, and as such he will always be looked upon as a vigorous proponent of the revolutionary doctrines of his day.

While Bage, Holcroft, Godwin, and others deplored the condition of women, and wrote much in their behalf, it remained for Mary Wollstonecraft to put into lasting form the various pleas of the century for her sex. In 1787 she wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters,* in which she denounced artificial manners and commended simplicity of conduct and practical knowledge. This pamphlet is a

kind of introduction to her better known work, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). The *Vindication* is remarkable for that time as a daring plea by a woman for her sex; it is the boldness, the fire and passion of her argument that have made the work live. There is nothing new in it but the spirit of its author. The book is poorly planned, is full of repetitions and digressions, but there is clearly running through it an unmistakable argument for the dignity of women as human beings. Like her predecessors she argued for marriage based upon esteem and friendship, and for the same education for both sexes, so that sex distinctions might be minimized. But while she asserted woman's capacity for many trades, she insisted that her chief place is the home, where she should have a voice in the education of her children. The sentimentalism of Richardson, Sterne, and Rousseau was vigorously assailed. She pleaded for women of dignity and sense.

II

Since one cannot escape the fact that the advocates of freedom for women in England and America took their first principles from France, a brief account of the movement toward the disillusionment of men and women in that country seems advisable at this point.

Some twenty years before Mary Astell and Defoe had pleaded for the social and intellectual freedom of women in England, Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723), in France, set forth the same contention in three remarkably modern books on the social position and education of women: *De l'Egalité des deux Sexes* (1673), *De l' Education des Dames* (1679), and *De l'Excellence des hommes contre l'Egalité des Sexes* (1675). S. A. Richards in *Feminist Writers of the Seventeenth Century,* (pp. 90-93), sums up Poulain's work in these terms: "He denies that woman is in any sense inferior to man: her characteristic failings are due to custom, tradition and defective education. She is in every way as capable as man, sex having no influence on mind, and even as regards physical effort for which her strength is insufficient, it is probable that with proper training she would acquit herself equally well." Poulain maintained that since virtue is based upon knowledge, education is an absolute essential for women's happiness and well-being. "As for the form that this education is to take, Poulain would shorten the route by omitting Greek and Latin, and substituting good French translations for the original classical authors. In other respects the curriculum would follow the lines of a liberal humanistic education." Poulain's works, like Brown's *Alcuin,* are cast in dialogue, and there is a striking similarity in the emphasis that both place on certain arguments; but I have been unable to find any specific reference to Poulain or his writings in Brown's works.

Montesquieu (1689-1755) in his *The Spirit of Laws*[20] had exalted the English constitution and endeavored to show that it was the influence of climate that differentiated the races of mankind. But this notion precluded, by the very nature of things, any possibility of reform, and consequently he was attacked from many quarters, particularly by Helvetius (1715-1771) in *Of Laws.*[21] In this book the first rumblings of the French Revolution were heard, and it became the text-book for young radicals for nearly a generation. Helvetius urged that men are the products of conditions—conditions, which education, in the larger sense, can greatly modify. He rejected the notion of innate ideas, and accounted for genius not by birth, but by differences in education. He even maintained that so-called idiots were capable of being *raised* by education to normal. Above all Helvetius denounced existing positive institutions, particularly of government, as the source of all the errors and prejudices of mankind. This last contention was strongly and more convincingly restated by Holbach (1723-1789) in his *The System of Nature.*[23] It is the wandering from nature's laws that has brought calamity upon mankind; it is to errors and prejudices that misunderstandings must be attributed. Unlike Rousseau, who asserted that man is born free, but is everywhere in chains, Holbach insisted that men never were free, that they have always been slaves to natural laws. Consequently, any positive institution must be false and injurious. This is a conception far removed from the social contract doctrine of the early eighteenth century. Indeed, it was just the step necessary to lead to revolution and reform in governments and morals. To men like Helvetius, Holbach, Voltaire, Diderot, and Turgot one must look for the early revolutionary impulse that stirred the men and women of two continents to demand reforms.

But when the great French Revolution came and the

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[20]*Esprit des lois* (1748).

[21]*De l'esprit* (1758).

[23]*Systeme de la nature* (1770).

young disciples of these so-called radicals were in the saddle, they displayed marked conservatism in the first constitution (1791). That great document declared that in order to be an active citizen it is necessary to be twenty-five years of age; to be domiciled in the city or canton for the time fixed by law. The voter had to present a tax receipt for taxes of the value of three days' work. It is notable that women were not to be classed as active citizens. As the revolution progressed there was a marked tendency to institute the reforms of the early agitators. On August 11, 1792, by a special decree, the distinction between active and non-active citizen was abolished; the age limit of voters was lowered to twenty-one; the period of residence was made one year; and no tax receipt was required. The voter had only to show that he was living on the income of his *own* labor. In the constitution of the Year One, (June 24, 1793), even the servant classes were given their freedom, and all foreigners who had done well for humanity were allowed to vote—Thomas Paine was a notable beneficiary of this condition. But this constitution never took effect. On February 4, 1794, negroes were made citizens of the French Republic.[24]

During the trying days of the Reign of Terror, Condorcet (1743-1794) wrote his *Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind,*[25] in which he commended the work of Turgot, Price, and Priestley, and gave particular emphasis to the famous doctrine of the infinite perfectibility of man. Among the causes of human improvement that one is most conducive to the general welfare that seeks the total annihilation of the prejudices which have established an inequality of rights between the sexes. In vain might one search for motives to justify this distinction in differences of physical organization, of intellect, or moral sensibility. Condorcet insisted even more strongly than Holbach had

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[24]Anderson, F. M., *The Constitutions and Other Select Documents Illustrative of the History of France* (1789-1901), Minneapolis, 1904.

[25]*Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progres de l'esprit humain* (1794).

done, upon the absolute necessity of reform in education for women. He courageously maintained that there should be no distinction in the form or content of the education of men and women; women should be allowed to study the natural sciences. They should be educated for motherhood. His final plea was that women have *natural* rights to all the knowledge that men are entitled to; and all instruction should be given in common, thus raising the standard of morality by annihilating false modesty.[26] These ideas are found in his report[27] to the Convention (1792) on the national education bill, and consequently had a wide circulation, and they mark Condorcet as the greatest champion of woman's rights before John Stuart Mill.

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[26]It is necessary to call attention to the fact that at the very outset of the Revolution certain radicals, among them Talleyrand-Périgord and Condorcet, made serious demands for universal suffrage, including women. These demands, embodied in the famous *Cahiers*, were presented to the king and to the National Assembly in 1789 by Condorcet, but they were rejected by both with scorn and derision.

[27]"Rapport sur l'organisation generale de l'instruction publique presente a l'Assemblee nationale legislative,

III

During the last decade of the eighteenth century, America became an asylum for the radicals and the political regugees of France and England, and as a rule these men joined in vigorously in the political disputes of the day. It is no wonder, then, that America was for a time a forum for the discussion of the rights of men and women. Nor is it surprising that Brockden Brown, then growing into manhood, was stirred by the arguments heard on every hand. Without doubt, it was during these formative years that Brown's zeal for the freedom of mankind was first awakened. And yet this is not the whole story, for there had been certain influences at work in America with which Brown must have been acquainted. Some account of these influences will now be taken.

The social condition of women in America in the eighteenth century was not markedly different from that in the mother country. There was perhaps less of social frivolity and immorality in sparsely settled America than in the crowded districts of the old world. But colonial customs and social distinctions paralleled in a remarkable way those in England. In regard to marriage the laws were strikingly similar. In America as in England the Quakers were most liberal in their views of matrimony; and owing to this liberality many false charges were brought against them. William Penn had held that marriage was a divine ordinance, and that God alone could rightly join men and women; consequently, the priest and ecclesiastical courts were ruled out. The Quakers, generally, believed that marriage was a matter to be left to the conscience of the individual man and woman. Thus it was said that they did not celebrate marriage decently.

Divorces during the eighteenth century in America on any ground were very difficult to obtain. In almost every case the laws favored the man. Connecticut, however, did insist upon the equality of men and women in matters of

divorce. In New York there was not a single case of divorce during the Colonial period, and only by a special act of the legislature could a marriage be annulled. In New Jersey and Pennsylvania there is no evidence that divorces, partial or absolute, were common. In the Southern States there is not a case of absolute divorce on record before 1775.[28]

Politically, however, the women of America fared better than their sisters in England and France. The early Puritans were not enthusiasts for political freedom, but there was a tendency toward democratic principles in their management of communities, particularly in town-meetings. Yet their idea of government was theocratic rather than democratic. It was among the Quakers of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, however, that the most liberal ideas of government were to be found. As a religious sect the Quakers stood alone in maintaining the essential equality of men and women, and in all important matters women were allowed the same rights as men. The Friends believed that the form of government did not matter so much as the character of the men in whose hands the government is lodged. Good men will make good laws.

Before the American Revolution there was, however, practically no philosophical speculation on theories of government, but a steady progress toward democratization is noticeable.[29] The lofty terms of the Declaration of Independence, nevertheless, opened men's minds, as they had never before been opened, to the essential principles of government. Locke and his English and French disciples became the basis for discussions. Natural rights, laws of nature, social contract, consent of the governed, the general welfare, were terms that became familiar to all Americans. It is not surprising, then, that some of them were led into fields of speculation and dreamed of ideal commonwealths.

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[28] *A History of Matrimonial Institutions Chiefly in England and the United States*, by George Elliott Howard, Chicago, 1904.

[29] *A History of American Political Theories*, by C. E. Merriam, New York, 1913.

The mildest of these held that government is a necessary evil, and that consequently the least government is the best government. This idea of the minimum of government became in time the fundamental doctrine of one of the great political parties. It was only one step from this essential fear of all government to the question of no government, or rather to the contemplation of a perfect state of society in which positive institutions are unnecessary.

In the formation of the American Constitution, however, as with the first French Constitution, the most radical became conservative to a marked degree, and the much-heralded *natural rights* and *natural equality* of the Declaration were partially, and in some instances entirely, brushed aside. The question of suffrage was an all-important one, and in the minds of the most liberal, the limitations put upon the exercise of the franchise were unjust and but one step removed from conditions in England. It was a turning back toward aristocracy. Thomas Jefferson was an advocate of universal male suffrage, but he acknowledged that those who insisted upon a property qualification were honest men, and had some solid basis of argument. Franklin held that it was an impropriety to allow the vote to those without landed property. The several state constitutions had various qualifications, and between federal and state limitations the actual voting population was but a small fraction of the male inhabitants. When all women, all slaves, all immigrants under a certain limit of residence, and all men who lacked the property qualification, were denied the franchise, it was plain to many Americans that democracy in practice was far from the ideal government that the Declaration proclaimed.

It is not strange, then, to find many who protested against this discrepancy. Although the majority of the Founding Fathers saw no inconsistency,[30] religious, property, or racial limitations were held by some, at least, to be inconsistent with the natural rights of man. There had been, nevertheless, a significant change in attitude among the leaders since

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[30]*A History of American Political Theories*, by C. E. Merriam.

1776. This reaction is best expressed in the Constitution of 1787, and when it was submitted for ratification the great men of the time split into two camps: those that favored the limited democracy of that instrument, and those that called for a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. *The Federalist*, a series of essays by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, took the side of the proposed constitution. Annual election, weak central government, and a more liberal franchise were advocated by the more democratic group, led by Jefferson. John Adams asserted that the people are unworthy of trust, and questioned the feasibility of any democratic government.

When the great shock of the French Revolution reached America, with a consequent swing to the Jeffersonian theories, there followed a decade of debate between Federalist and Republicans which drew to it almost every American of talent. The pamphlet war which resulted was the fiercest known in American history. John Adams was the leader of the reactionary Federalists, Jefferson of the democratic group, and around these two men the nation gathered. Jefferson was the more popular leader, with his trust in the ultimate wisdom of the mass of plain people. And his cause triumphed until the Reign of Terror in France alarmed the more conservative of his followers. This alarm over its alleged alliance with the radicals of France gave rise to a most scathing attack on the Republican party. That Jefferson's philosophy of government was largely derived from France cannot be denied, but he was far from the radical that his opponents painted him. He did highly commend the work of Condorcet, particularly *The Progress of the Human Mind*, and he may have derived some of his own ideas from this work.

In the numerous political discussions that make up so much of American history in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a few pages at least were devoted to the rights of women. Margaret Brent of Maryland asserted her right to a seat in the legislature; Richard Henry Lee was an advocate of woman suffrage; and Abigail Adams

wrote to her husband in their behalf.[31] The Quakers had always maintained, as has been already observed, the essential equality of women with men. But the general attitude toward women is best expressed in a letter by John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, in which he said: "But why exclude women? You will say, because their delicacy renders them unfit for practice and experience in the great businesses of life, and the hardy enterprises of war, as well as the arduous cares of state. Besides, their attention is so much engaged with the necessary nurture of their children, that nature has made them fittest for domestic cares.[32]

Certain state constitutions, however, admitted women to a larger share in the life of the state than they could hope for under the federal government. This was notably the case in New Jersey, where from 1790 to 1807, women were allowed to vote, a privilege due largely it seems, to the liberality of the Quakers of that state. It should be noted, however, that they rarely exercised this right. But an occasion once arose in which the woman vote became the deciding factor, and gave rise to a most lively discussion in the press. John Condit of Newark, a Republican, and William Crane of Elizabethtown, a Federalist, were in a close race for the legislature, and in an endeavor to defeat his opponent, Crane secured many women from Elizabethtown to vote for him, but he was defeated. The newspaper war which followed, for and against woman suffrage, soon passed beyond the bounds of the state, and for some time centered attention on the rights of women.[33] This event, the exciting national election of 1796, and the criticism of the Jay Treaty, undoubtedly furnished ample incentive for Brockden Brown's *Alcuin* or *The Rights of Women.*

Such is a brief account of some of the more important phases of the emancipation of woman. We have seen that the promise which the Reformation held out was very slow

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[31]*A History of American Political Theories*, by C. E. Merriman.
[32]*Library of American Literature*, Vol. III, p. 199-200.
[33]*Smith College Studies in History*, Vol. I, pp. 165-187.

in working its way into the minds of the later Puritans, but nevertheless, there were gains, however slight they may have been. It has been pointed out how in the latter part of the seventeenth century, both in France and in England, a great impetus was given to the movement by writers like Mary Astell, Defoe, Fénelon, Poulain de la Barre, and others; and how that movement increased until almost every writer of any importance was drawn to one side or the other of the question. We have also seen how, as the forces which made for the great revolutions in France and America became dominant, the rights of women were merged with the greater rights of mankind. It has likewise been observed that, although the movement had an early beginning in England, it was in France that it reached its earliest maturity. It was to France that young English and American democrats looked for inspiration. It was from France that the first principles of the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin came. We have seen that in both France and England emphasis was first placed upon the social and intellectual emancipation of women, but that in the closing decades of the eighteenth century arguments centered around their economic and political freedom. It is of this latter side of the movement that Brockden Brown became an ardent proponent.

To say that Brown was familiar with the great body of this literature of dissent would be, of course, an unwarranted assumption; but that he was acquainted with much of it is beyond dispute. Concerning Brown's formative years, it is said "that he was a frail, studious child, reputed a prodigy, and encouraged by his parents in that frantic feeding upon books which was expected, in those days, of every American boy of parts. By the time he was sixteen he had made himself a tolerable classical scholar—and hurt his health by over-work. As he grew older he read with a hectic, desultory sweep in every direction open to him. With his temper and education, he developed into a hot young philosopher in those days of revolution. He brooded over the maps of remote regions, glowed with eager schemes for

perfecting mankind."[34] This zeal for knowledge and this enthusiasm for the betterment of mankind were not at all singular in a boy reared amidst the bustle and shifting scenes of the nation's intellectual and political capital. Philadelphia thronged with French political refugees. And during these stirring days Brown is reputed to have learned the French language that he might gain a first-hand knowledge of French literature. Such names as Fénelon, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, Voltaire, Rousseau, are scattered through the pages of his early essays and addresses. It must be remembered, too, that Brown had access to the best libraries in the nation, and that he frequented the home of that liberal-minded American, Benjamin Franklin. When all these facts are considered, one is not surprised that Brown showed himself familiar with all the current arguments for the social, political, and economic rights of man and woman. It appears now that he had decided opinions on such matters before the appearance of the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and that those opinions were stimulated by his French reading. An analysis of *Alcuin* will show that Brown's sources were not specific, but general.

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[34]Van Doren, *Cambridge History of American Literature*, Vol. I, p. 287.

IV

Alcuin is important as the first published volume of the first professional author in America, and it is interesting to the bibliographer as one of the rarest American books.[35] And yet the curious student will search in vain for any accurate discussion of it. According to Dunlap it was written in the "fall and winter of the year 1797,"[36] and the same year has often been referred to as the year of publication. There is reason to believe, however, that *Alcuin* was composed during the exciting fall of 1796. It was issued in book form from the press of T. & J. Swords, No. 99 Pearl Street, New York, in March, 1798, and reprinted in the *Weekly Magazine* of Philadelphia (March 17—April 7, 1798) as *The Rights of Women.* Dunlap's statement that it was written in the fall and winter of 1797 has misled every subsequent critic of Brown's work. No one, it seems, has ever suspected the existence of a sequel to *Alcuin,* and yet, by a curious circumstance, it is the sequel or second dialogue and not the original upon which discussion of the book has been based.[37] The matter is easy to explain. The

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[35]The only copy of which I have any knowledge is in the New York Public Library.

[36]*Life of Brown,* Vol. I, p. 70.

[37](A) "Brown's inquisitive and speculative mind partook of the prevailing skepticism. Some of his compositions, and especially one on *The Rights of Women,* published in 1797, shows to what extent a benevolent mind may be led."—W. H. Prescott in Sparks' "*Library of American Biography,*" Vol. I, p. 129. (B) "Near the close of 1797 he published his first work, Alcuin, A Dialogue on the Rights of Women. It is not without ingenuity."—*The Prose Writers of America,* Griswold, p. 107. (C) "He wrote in the fall and winter of 1797 a work which he refers to in his journal as 'the dialogue of Alcuin, in which the topic of marriage is discussed with some degree of subtlety at least.' It was published in the same year, but its crude and hazardous theories on the subject of divorce and other social topics attracted little attention." E. A. and G. L. Duyckinck in the *Cyclopedia of American Literature,* Vol. I, p. 397. (D) "His first work, 'The Dialogues of Alcuin,' published in 1797, to which he refers

original *Alcuin* as published by Swords, March, 1798, carried an "Advertisement" signed by E. H. Smith, in which he states that "the following dialogue was put into my hands, the last spring, by a friend who resides at a distance, with liberty to make it public. I have since been informed that he has continued the discussion of the subject in another dialogue." Now the Smith *Alcuin* is, as I have stated, exceedingly rare, and it appears that no critic has ever compared it with the "copious extracts" in Dunlap's *Life of Brown.* It has simply been assumed that Dunlap quoted from the original *Alcuin.* A comparison, however, shows

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in his journal as discussing the topic of marriage, attracted little attention, and many of the theories advanced on the subject of divorce were subsequently abandoned by the author."—*The National Cyclopaedia of America Biography,* Vol. II, p. 59. (E) From Mary Wollstonecraft "he derived the idea of his next work, *The Dialogue of of Alcuin,* 1797, an enthusiastic but inexperienced essay on the question of woman's rights and liberties."—*The Encyclopaedia Brittannica,* Eleventh Edition. (F) "It is not surprising, therefore, that his first publication, *Alcuin,* in 1797, dealt with the social position of woman, and advocated a very advanced theory of divorce. This brief work, in the form of a rather stilted dialogue, made little impression." Trent and Erskine in "*Great American Writers,* p. 15. (G) "In 1797 he published a work on marriage and divorce entitled *The Dialogue of Alcuin.*"—Wendell and Greenough's *A History of Literature in America.* (H) "The spirit of Godwin stirred eagerly in Brown during the early days of his freedom. Toward the end of 1797 he bore witness by writing *Alcuin,* a dialogue on the rights of women which took its first principles from Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin." Van Doren, Chapter VI, *The Cambridge History of American Literature.* In an unpublished article recently put into my hands Professor Carl Van Doren, however, takes note of this confusion.

There is an entry in Dunlap's *Diary,* August 8, 1797, which lends support to the statement *Alcuin* was published in 1797. He writes: "Now S[mith] showed me 2 dialogues called Alcouin sent on by B. to be forwarded to Danies paper." It is quite likely that Dunlap—none too careful with his spelling at any time—meant to write Dennie's instead of Danies. Joseph Dennie, a friend and correspondent of Smith, was at this time editor of *The Farmer's Museum* of Walpole, New Hampshire. As I have not yet had access to the complete files of this paper, I cannot deny that *Alcuin* was published therein. But granting that it was published in 1797, its appearance did not prevent subsequent confusion with the second dialogue.

that only three and one-half pages in Dunlap were taken from the Smith *Alcuin*—to serve, it seems, as an introduction to the second dialogue published in Dunlap's *Life* in 1815. The Smith *Alcuin* is a small volume of seventy-seven pages or approximately eleven thousand words, and is divided into two parts to correspond to Alcuin's two visits to the home of Mrs. Carter, who conducts a kind of Philadelphia salon. The dialogue as printed in the *Weekly Magazine* differs in many points from the Smith *Alcuin.* It is somewhat shorter; the title is changed to *The Rights of Women;* the hero is Edwin instead of Alcuin; significant references to certain famous characters and events are omitted; the slur on the professions of soldier and barber is deleted; and the last thirteen lines of *Alcuin* are lacking in the magazine edition. Why Brown made these changes is not readily seen, and why he failed to have Smith make the same alterations in the volume published by Swords, both of which appeared in print during the same month, is even more mysterious. It seems likely that Swords printed the book in the spring of 1797 or soon thereafter, but did not publish it until March, 1798. This asssumption would explain the differences in the two versions.

The concluding paragraph of the Smith *Alcuin* clearly points to a sequel. "Here the conversation was interrupted by one of the company, who, after listening to us for some time, thought proper at last to approach, and contribute his mite to our mutual edification. I soon seized an opportunity of withdrawing, but not without requesting and obtaining permission to repeat by visit." The Smith "Advertisement" definitely states that the discussion was continued in another dialogue. That Dunlap's "copious extracts" are the continuation of the subject foreshadowed in *Alcuin* and clearly expressed in the "Advertisement," is beyond cavil. Then, too, the permission to repeat his visit which Alcuin sought is realized in the continuation—which begins: "A week elapsed and I repeated by visit to Mrs. Carter." The continuation, referred to hereafter as the second dialogue, was entitled *Alcuin* in the Philadelphia edition (1815) of

Dunlap's *Life of Brown*, and the *Paradise of Women*[38] in the London edition of that work (1822).

It is safe to conclude, then, that it was to the second dialogue that Dunlap referred as being written in the fall and winter of 1797. Smith and Dunlap both agree that the second dialogue was written after March, 1797. The time of the first is less certain, but more significant, as it was Brown's first publication. Reasoning from internal evidence alone, however, the date can be quite definitely established as the fall of 1796. On page eleven of *Alcuin* the priggish schoolmaster speaks of the pleasure he derives during his leisure evenings from watching a declining moon and the varying firmament with the optics of "Dr. Young." The Dr. Young here referred to was Thomas Young (1773-1829), a noted British physicist, whose paper on the structure of the eye was read before the Royal Society when he was only twenty years old, and established for him the name of founder of physiological optics. Young shortly thereafter went to Germany, and in July, 1796 received the degree of doctor of physic from the University of Göttingen. On his return to England, he was hailed as a great genius. It is not likely that Brown would refer to him as Dr. Young before July, 1796. Significant, too, is Alcuin's remark, on page fourteen, that "the theme of the discourse was political. The edicts of Carnot, and the commentary of that profound jurist, Peter Porcupine, had furnished ample materials of discussion." Lazare Nichols Marguerite Carnot (1753-1823) was a member of the French Convention, an important member of the Committee of Public Safety, and the guiding genius of the Executive Directory. He became a member of the Directory in 1795, and because of his opposition to the extreme measures of his colleague Barras, he was suspected of royalist sympathy and was sentenced to deportation in 1797. He spoke strongly against the violations of the Bill of Rights, and objected to the dictatorial and autocratic action of the Directory. But Brown's refer-

[38]In Bage's novel, *Man As He Is* (1792), France is referred to as the "paradise of women," Vol. II, p. 234.

ence to the edicts of Carnot undoubtedly suggests the uncompromising measures which Carnot felt were necessary during the troublous fall of 1796. In order to put down royalist and anarchistic plots, the Directory assumed absolute power over the life and property of the citizen. It is quite certain, however, that Brown had in mind Carnot's instruction to Citizen Adet, the French minister to the United States, to address a note to the American Secretary of State reproaching the Washington Administration for the position of the President in his *Farewell Address* and for the Administration's attitude toward the Jay Treaty. Citizen Adet declared that America had violated her sacred treaty with the French Republic, and that as a solemn protest against that dereliction his government had instructed him to suspend his duties as minister. War with France or rather with the Directory seemed imminent.[39]

Peter Porcupine, mentioned in the same sentence with Carnot and referred to as a profound jurist, was William Cobbett (1762-1835). He was an English soldier, essayist, politician, editor, and farmer who came to the United States in 1792 to seek a berth with the Washington Administration. But, failing in this, he settled down in Philadelphia as a tutor in English to French political refugees. In 1794 Joseph Priestley also came to America and plunged immediately into the fight for republicanism. This action of Priestley drew Cobbett to the defense of the Federalists, and his vicious attack upon the friends of democracy stirred up the bitterest pamphlet war known in American history. He issued at Philadelphia a monthly pamphlet under the title of *The Censor* (January, 1796-to March, 1797) which he signed as Peter Porcupine. In this paper he was a vigorous and unreasonable advocate of everything British and a violent critic of everything republican. Cobbett even went so far as to place in the windows of his bookstore in Philadelphia pictures of nobles, princes, and kings—including the infamous George the Third. We first learn of him as Peter Porcupine in January, 1796, but if one may judge from

[39]Stanwood, Edward, *A History of the Presidency*, Vol. I, 1898.

newspaper allusions, he was not well known under this pseudonym until August of the same year. In September, 1796, he wrote, "What must I feel upon seeing the newspapers filled from top to bottom—with *A Blue Shop for Peter Porcupine, A Pill for Peter Porcupine, Peter Porcupine Detected,*"[40] etc. Cobbett reached the zenith of his ravings against American and French republicanism during the fall elections of 1796.

While these allusions to contemporary characters and events do not definitely fix the date of the Smith *Alcuin,* they at least point to an earlier one than has usually been assigned.

It is unfortunate that Brown is known only by the second dialogue, which is on the very face of it only an Utopian dream, not to be taken as representing Brown's real opinions. It is significant, too, that the second dialogue is one of the few pieces that remained unpublished during the lifetime of the author. It is a work of pure speculation, and as such may represent Brown's fanciful interpretation of society in Godwin's *Political Justice.* But it will be seen that the commonwealth here described has more in common with the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More than with the speculations of William Godwin. In fact the influence of Godwin on the thought of the two dialogues diminishes in proportion as one studies them in relation to the temper of the age.

The discussions in the first dialogue, on the other hand, are thoroughly sincere and practical, and represent the most respectable democratic doctrine of the day. Indeed, it is Brown's contribution to the great debate between the Federalists and Republicans during the stormy days of 1796, and registers his protest against the conservative American Constitution. Brown, with others, had been clearly disappointed with the failure of the framers of the Constitution to embody in that document the principles of the Declaration of Independence. The Smith *Alcuin* is, furthermore, the

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[40]*Selections from Cobbett's Political Works:* being a complete abridgement of the 100 volumes which comprise the writings of *Peter Porcupine,* London, 1835.

first extended serious argument for the rights of women that had yet appeared in America, and as such it merits the praise that is the pioneer's. It is the author's plea for the natural right of women to share in the political and economic life of the nation. In this general claim for women Brown was not at all singular, as has already been pointed out, for he only gave voice to a time-honored Quaker conviction of the essential equality of women with men. Furthermore, we have seen that this conception of women's rights and capabilities was of slow growth from Mary Astell to Brockden Brown, and that it was neither fathered nor fostered exclusively by only one. So much for the general character of the work.

As *Alcuin* is almost inaccessible, a detailed account of it is advisable. In each dialogue the argument is conveyed in a conversation between the priggish schoolmaster Alcuin and the widowed Mrs. Carter, a Philadelphia blue-stocking.[41] She is familiar with the current arguments for the rights of women, and generally takes a more radical stand than Alcuin. Her argument goes beyond that of Mary Wollstonecraft, whose plea is fundamentally for the emancipation of women from low social standards through an education similar to that for men; Mrs. Carter's contention is for political and economic equality with men. Indeed, her ideas on this and other subjects are so singular that her home becomes a rendezvous for all liberal and respectable talent, so that perhaps the strongest inducement to visit her home was not the attraction of the woman, but that of the brilliant society that gathered there. Following the description of Mrs. Carter and her liberal coterie is a bit of philosophy on the comparative merits of reading and conversation as means of instruction. Like Swift, Alcuin sings the praises of conversation. Books are too dull and insipid, and he hates a lecturer, because his audience cannot canvass each step in the argument. Formal debate is also condemned. But conversation is free and unfettered and blends, more happily

[41]Brown may wish to remind his readers of the famous London blue-stocking, Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806).

than any other method of instruction, utility and pleasure. Alcuin spends the day in repeating the alphabet or engraving on infantile minds that twice three make six, and the evening, until his acquaintance with Mrs. Carter, in amplifying the seductive suppositions, "if I were a king" or "if I were a lover." The schoolmaster longs for the liberalising influence that only the conversation of the ingenious can give, and after a careful self-analysis he decides to become a frequent visitor at the home of Mrs. Carter. We are now, after fourteen dreary pages of introduction, permitted to hear the dialogue between Mrs. Carter and Alcuin. The very dullness and narrow outlook of this prologue, the least attractive part of the book, stand in striking contrast to the liberal views that follow.

Alcuin, when the embarrassment of the introduction to the circle is over, respectfully withdraws to a corner of the room and there finds opportunity to engage the lady in conversation. He somewhat awkwardly begins: "Pray, madam, are you a federalist?" She evades the question, and replies indirectly that she has often been called upon to listen to political discussions, but never before was she asked her own opinion. Mrs. Carter declares that women, shallow and inexperienced as they all are, have nothing to do with politics; that their time is consumed in learnng the price of ribbon or tea or in plying the needle. No wonder, then, she asserts with Defoe, Swift,[42] and others, that women are narrow, and for the sake of variety they sometimes wander into the pleasant fields of scandal. Alcuin admits the force of this argument, but submits that the work of woman is not less useful and honorable than that of many professions assigned to men, notably those of barber and soldier. He dwells on the noble character of practical, simple, every-

[42]Mary Astell, Defoe, Swift, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Godwin, whose ideas are paralleled in *Alcuin*, are not specifically mentioned; Plato, Lycurgus, Newton, and Locke are, however.

day work.[43] He further declares that women are the equals of men in all essential respects and morally their superiors; that the distinctions based upon sex differences are of no consequence; and with the whole body of French and English advocates of the rights of women, Alcuin maintains that whatever important distinctions there are between men and women are the direct results of differences in opportunities. Women are superficial and ignorant because they are generally cooks and seamstresses.

But unlike those who believe in the infinite perfectibility of man, Alcuin takes a pessimistic view. He declares that it is doubtful whether the career of the species will end in knowledge, and with Locke he holds that man is born in ignorance, that habit has given permanence to error. He rejects the notion of innate ideas. Through ignorance or prejudice certain employments have been exclusively assigned to men, and the constitutional aversion of human nature to any change has confirmed this error. Mrs. Carter adds that of all forms of injustice that is most vicious which makes the circumstance of sex a reason for excluding half of mankind from the more useful and honorable professions. Alcuin falls back for a moment upon the respectable Whig doctrine of "Whatever is, is right," and replies that the real evil lies in the fact that so much human capacity is perverted.[44] Then Alcuin follows the argument of Plato, More, and Godwin in desiring to have all tasks shared in common without distinction of sex, but, unlike Godwin, Alcuin is not sure that such an arrangement would be practicable. He laments that, on account of a perverted civilization, large portions of mankind are doomed to toil, but he laments thus not because they are men or women, but because they are human bengs. This is in line with the

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[42]Alcuin's reasoning here parallels in a remarkable way that of Fénelon in his *De l'education des filles* (1681). It is very likely that Brown was acquainted with this work, as he certainly was with *Telemaque*, for he mentions Fénelon in an address before the Belles Lettres Club.

[44]Cf. Poulain's *De l'Egalité des deux Sexes.*

humanitarian movement of the latter part of the eighteenth century and is not exclusively Godwinian. But Mrs. Carter insists that under any arrangement women would bear the greater burden because of the duties of motherhood. Alcuin replies that luxury and its attendant evils have greatly increased that burden. Mrs. Carter believes that woman's field of usefulness is too much limited by a consideration of her function as mother, particularly as regards the liberal professions.[45] But Alcuin insists that women are not really excluded from the higher professions, that in Europe at least women are found in such professions. He could never wish woman to stoop to the practice of law, and as for the ministry some sects (the Quakers and Methodists, of course) do not debar women from the pulpit. The Christian religion has done much to break down distinctions of rank, wealth, and sex. Mrs. Carter does not try to refute Alcuin's argument, but she points out that all professions which require most vigor of mind, the greatest contact with enlightened society and books, are filled by men only. Alcuin replies by attacking all the liberal professions, charging them with sordid motives; usefulness as such is but a secondary consideration. Benevolence, universal benevolence, should be the keynote of all the liberal callings—college degrees and examinations matter but little.

At this point Mrs. Carter broaches the question of woman's education. She takes the same line of argument as Defoe, Swift, and others that women have been educated for the profession of household slaves, that women of quality are instructed in the art of the coquette. Men believe that women should be thus educated; consequently, they are excluded from schools and colleges. Here again Alcuin takes a wholly unexpected turn in his argument by questioning the advisability of a college education, even for men, for it seems unfavorable to moral and intellectual improvement.[46] It would be indelicate to conduct mixed classes in

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[45]Cf. Poulain's *De l'Egalité des deux Sexes.*

[46]Fénelon in *L'Education des Filles* takes this same position. See also John Trumbull's *The Progress of Dulness* (1772-3). The same strictures on college education are found in the works of Hopkinson and Freneau.

anatomy or other such subjects. This idea of false modesty gives Mrs. Carter an opportunity to inveigh against those who urge the separation of the sexes on the score of delicacy. With Mary Wollstonecraft and Condorcet she insists that nothing has been so injurious as the separation of the sexes. They are associated in childhood, but soon they are made to take different paths, learn different languages, different maxims, different pursuits; their relations become fettered and embarrassed. With the one all is reserve and artifice, with the other adulation and affected humility: the man must affect ardor, the woman indifference—her tongue belies the sentiments of her heart and the dictates of her mind. Her early life is a preparation for marriage; her married life is a state of slavery. She loses all title to private property, and the right of private opinion; she knows nothing but the will of her husband, and she may prevail only by tears and blandishments.

Alcuin thinks this a great exaggeration, but Mrs. Carter asserts that the picture is exact, that her own life has suffered from a mistaken education. Man is physically stronger and thus in the primitive condition of society, woman was enslaved; but the tendency toward rational improvement has been to equalize conditions and to level all distinctions not based upon truth and reason. Women have benefited by this progress of reason, but they are not wholly exempt from servitude. Alcuin admits that the lot of woman is hard, but he points out that it is the preferable one, freest from the thorns of life—and then he trails off into the song of the needle, and the hand that conjures a piano. Mrs. Carter replies that this is but a panegyric on indolence and luxury, in which neither distinguished virtue nor true happiness is found. Alcuin agrees that ease and luxury are pernicious; that the rich and the poor alike are denied real happiness and peace,[47] but still their lot is better than brutal toil and ignorance. He concludes his argument by a state-

[47]This point is particularly emphasized in Poulain's *De l'Egalité des deux Sexes.*

ment that there is something wrong with society as it is now constituted, and appeals to Mrs. Carter to waive the problem of women and urge the much greater claims of enslaved human beings.

Again Alcuin inquires of Mrs. Carter whether she is a federalist; again she protests that women have nothing to do with politics, that the American government takes no heed of them, that the Constitution-makers, without the slightest consciousness of inconsistency or injustice, excluded them from all political rights, and made no distinction between women and irrational animals. In the sense that she prefers union to dissension she is a federalist; but if the term means the approval of the Constitution as a document embodying the principles of right and justice, she is not a federalist.

It is when Mrs. Carter inveighs against the Constitution of the United States as harsh and unjust that she waxes most eloquent. She scoffs at the maxims of the Constitution that proclaim that all power is derived from the people, that liberty is every one's birthright and is the immediate gift of God to all mankind, that those who are subject to the laws should enjoy a share in their enactment. These maxims are specious, and our glorious Constitution in practice is a system of tyranny. One is denied a voice in the election of his governor because he is not twenty-one; another because he has not been a resident for two years; a third because he can not show a tax receipt; a fourth because his skin is black; a fifth merely because she is a woman. So what have we to boast in the name of divinest liberty when only a small fraction of our people have a voice in our government?

Here Alcuin takes refuge in the Quaker doctrine that the spirit is of vastly more importance than the form of government; that the value of any government is measured by the character of the men who administer its laws. But this subtle distinction between power and the exercise of power does not find favor with Mrs. Carter; she wishes a voice

in the choice of even the wise man. She is willing to admit that government by the wisest would be the best government, but how are the sages to be distinguished from the mediocre, and how is one to know that the wise man cannot be corrupted? That government is best, all things considered, that consults the feelings and judgments of the governed. Alcuin insists, however, that some qualifications should be required of the voter. Mrs. Carter sidetracks by saying that she is not arguing the claims of mankind in general, but the rights of women in particular; for mere sex is so purely a physical matter that to make it a basis for excluding one-half of mankind from the enjoyment of their natural rights is sheer folly.

Alcuin is most absurd in the eyes of Mrs. Carter when he suggests that women justly relinquish all claims to liberty and property when they marry; that they are contented with their present position; that they would not exercise the rights of citizens if the privilege were extended to them —this was a common argument in New Jersey where women had the privilege of voting, but very seldom took part in the elections. Alcuin admits that he is prejudiced, that he could never bring himself to sympathize with the claims of women to rights in business and politics; but he closes the argument by prudently acknowledging that since women are as thoughtful as men, and are more beautiful, they are therefore the superior sex.

Thus ends the first dialogue or the Smith *Alcuin.* Just why Dunlap elected to publish the more Utopian second is a matter that passes understanding. It is only possible that he wished thereby to re-create the speculative phase through which Brown was then (1797) passing. That Dunlap was acquainted with the first dialogue is evident from the fact he recorded in his *Diary* (April 28, 1798): "Read today Smith's publication of Brown's 'Alcuin,' 1 & 2 parts." Then on the following day he notes that he read parts three and four. It may be suggested that Dunlap felt that the first dialogue had received sufficient publication in the Smith volume and the *Weekly Magazine.* Certainly Dunlap thought

highly of the first one, for an entry in his *Diary* (August 8, 1797) states that "there is much truth, philosophical accuracy and handsome writing in the essay." Perhaps, if Dunlap had foreseen the misunderstanding growing out of his publication of the second dialogue, he would have spared his friend's reputation.

V

The second work opens with Alcuin's declaration that he has just returned from a visit to the paradise of women—a phrase commonly applied to France—and that the journey had been made instantaneously. To allay Mrs. Carter's suspicion, Alcuin gives a lecture on the nature of the external world, following with almost verbal minuteness at times, the argument which George Berkeley (1685-1733) advanced to show that the external world[48] exists only in the mind that perceives it. Alcuin states that the language of the people whom he visited is *English;* that their buildings show traces of Greek and Roman models.

This may be meant to suggest Godwin's *Political Justice,* but more likely *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, for Godwin says little about the rights of women apart from their matrimonial enslavement. But with the *Utopia* there are numerous points of contact. The frame-work is suggestive of *Gulliver's Travels.* In this island commonwealth of Brown both sexes were engaged in "awakening by their notes, the neighboring echoes, or absorbed in musing silence, or engaged in sprightly debate." There were vast halls for musicians and dancers; halls where state affairs were the theme of sonorous rhetoric, or where the poet or annalist, or the chemist, or the mechanical inventor, displayed his gifts.

At this point Mrs. Carter stinteth Alcuin of his glowing description; she wishes information unembarrassed by rhetoric or ignorant conjecture. In response he draws a picture of conditions as he observed them: there was no distinction in dress; the women shared equally with men in all recreational activities; in the matter of art, poetry, science, or debate the sexes mingled their inquiries, as all were votaries of reason. As Gulliver found it difficult to

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[48] *Dialogues,* p. 379 ff.; *Commonplace Book,* Vol. I, p. 92. Alexander C. Fraser ed. It should be noted that Godwin in the second edition of *Political Justice* (1796) had a brief footnote on Berkeley's theory, but Brown does not seem to have followed him.

make himself understood among the Houyhnhnms because of the irrational meanings that he attached to words, just so Alcuin is rebuffed in drawing moral and political distinctions from a consideration of a difference in sex. His guide admits finally that he has heard of nations of men universally infected by error, and asks Alcuin to give an account of some of those errors. He mentions differences in dress, in education, in occupations, and in marriage. The guide replies that utility guided by reason should determine one's choice in dress; as to education it is preposterous to think that there should be any difference for the two sexes—the only demand made is that those instructed be rational. With Locke he holds that we are born in ignorance, that ideas are received only through the senses, that our knowledge broadens with our experiences. In this, nature has made no distinction in the sexes; education and environment are the deciding factors in one's career, and the proper educational ideal is a curious mind in a sound body. The young are admitted to the assemblies of their elders and are instructed by them, as in the *Utopia.* Conversations, books, instruments, specimens of art and nature, haunts of meditation, public halls, and leisure are at the disposal of all without discrimination of age or sex—again suggesting *Utopia.*

As all must be provided with food, clothing, and shelter, all must share in the production of these necessities. Agriculture is considered the most useful occupation, as in the *Utopia;* all are obliged to till the soil, thereby eliminating any drudgery that would otherwise be the lot of a few. One should share in the common labor, not because he shares in the fruits, but because he is being guided by reason and susceptible of happiness. It therefore becomes one's privilege to promote the happiness of others. Alcuin suggests that women are usually thought to be too soft and delicate for rough and toilsome occupations, to which his interlocutor replies that that is the argument of men.

At this juncture the conversation is changed from the general to the specific subject of marriage. Mrs. Carter here interposes a caution against Alcuin's overstepping the

bounds of modesty in the discussion of so delicate a question. She warns him that she is prepossessed in favor of the system of marriage, but she is willing to reason on the matter. With the preliminary sparring on questions of delicacy and sophistry over, Alcuin begins by declaring that in that paradise there is no institution of marriage. Mrs. Carter sees at once the course of his argument and accuses him of being in sympathy with that class of reasoners lately risen—meaning most likely Godwin and the whole French school—"who aim at the deepest foundation of civil society." She is thrown on the defensive and protests in solemn tones her belief in the institution of marriage, for without it all perception of moral rectitude would be destroyed. Mrs. Carter vigorously denounces Godwin's position on marriage and the sacred charities of family life—of course Godwin's name is not mentioned, but his pet phrases are. Alcuin reminds Mrs. Carter that she once submitted specific objections to the present system of marriage; that it renders the woman a slave to the man, that it leaves the woman destitute of property.

At this point Alcuin philosophizes at length on the nature of property and its relation to the family, following rather closely Locke's ideas. With the same authority he urges that since the family must have some head the natural head is the man. Here, curiously, Mrs. Carter takes her main argument from Godwin in his condemnation of cohabitation as the destroyer of reverence, personality, opinion, liberty, and self-respect. But still Mrs. Carter insists that the institution of marriage is sacred, "but iniquitous laws, by making it a compact of slavery, by imposing impracticable conditions and extorting impious promises have, in most countries, converted it into something flagitious and hateful." Her remedy is spontaneous, unlimited divorce on the complaint of either party—such as obtained in France at that time. This is followed by a gruesome picture of the ills of domestic life. Such ills often result from a marriage of love or convenience, but seldom from one based upon friendship guided by reason. She borrows Godwin's phrase "groundless and obstinate attachment"[49] to describe those affections that persist beyond reason.

[49]Godwin, William, *Political Justice*, Vol. II, p. 245.

Emboldened by Mrs. Carter's liberal views, Alcuin dares to advance a step further by suggesting that marriage is but custom after all, a suggestion, however, which Mrs. Carter rejects. She ends the dialogue by restating her position. Marriage, she says, is a union founded on free and mutual consent; it cannot exist without friendship and personal fidelity; it will cease to be just when it ceases to be spontaneous.

As the author's first serious publication, *Alcuin* is promising. The style is simple, easy, and forceful; the descriptions vivid and accurate, and the argument persuasive. But as a whole it is crude and unorganized; it lacks a good disposition of the material and a consistent grasp of character; and the conversation is not at all brilliant. Only the unusualness of the ideas could ever have made it interesting. But now that those ideas have been largely realized, one finds it increasingly difficult to read the book with sustained interest. Co-education is general, the professions are open to men and women without discrimination, women now have a share in the enactment of the laws under which they live, the marriage bond no longer makes a slave of the woman, and it begins to appear that spontaneous and unlimited divorce is the rule of the day. Common as these things are now, they were in Brown's day most revolutionary, and for the advocacy of such, many men and women were dogged unceasingly by the law, particularly in France and England.

It does not appear, however, that *Alcuin* made the least stir in America; even among the author's friends this maiden attempt was received but coldly. The Smith *Alcuin* must have had only a small circulation, for it is now one of the rarest American books. The version in the Philadelphia *Weekly Magazine*, of course, reached a much larger public, but there is not the least evidence that it attracted any special attention. Smith in the "Advertisement" held out a promise of a second dialogue on the same subject if the first received a cordial welcome. It is to be observed that the second remaining in hiding until 1815. Brown must have felt that his talent did not lie in the field of dialectics, for he immediately turned to the writing of romances to release the energy that stirred in him.